



Observation Protocol #2

Focus Point

Adapted for observing students in ATLAS Communities from Peer Observation Protocols created by the National School Reform Faculty.

This protocol is designed to help deepen the observed's understanding of his or her practice. The observer(s)' role is to note those events that relate to a particular aspect of the observed's practice and to then act as an active listener as the observed attempts to make sense of those events.

Pre-Observation Conference

In addition to outlining what will be occurring during the observation, the person to be observed asks the observer(s) to focus on a particular aspect of his practice. Example: "Would you look at how I respond to student questions?"

Observation

The observer(s) focus on that aspect of practice raised during the pre-observation conference. Field notes include both descriptions of "focus" events and related questions that the observer may wish to raise during the debriefing. The observer(s) may also wish to note events and questions outside the focus of the observation, but these may or may not be discussed during the debriefing.

Debriefing

The observer(s) begin by restating the focus and asking the observed to share her thoughts. Example: "What did you notice about how you responded to student questions?" As the observed talks, the observer(s) 1) supply specific events that either corroborate or contrast with the observed's statements, 2) summarize what the observed is saying, 3) ask clarifying questions, and/or 4) raise questions related to the focus that were noted during the observation.

Note: Events and questions not directly related to the focus of the observation should only be raised after asking for permission from the observed, and some practitioners think even asking for permission is inappropriate. The observer(s) should refrain from stating their ideas and perspective on the issues unless specifically invited to do so. An important principle in this process is that at all times the person who is being observed is the one who is in control of the situation.

Further Thoughts on the Process, especially when the observer has been designated as the "coach:"

- Each person should choose the person or people with whom they will work. They should agree to take turns being the observer and observed.
- The pair (or triad) should establish ground rules for giving and receiving feedback. (For example: "Our observation data will remain confidential; we will meet to follow up on the observation within 24 hours of the observation.")
- The person asking for feedback specifies the areas in which they want feedback. (For example: "Track the kinds of questions I ask: are they memory questions, or do they require evaluation? Do I give

enough time for students to answer? Do I ask boys more questions than girls? How did the small groups work together when I wasn't there?")

- The observer(s), armed with a short list of what to look for from the person being observed, comes and watches the class or meeting for a short time (15-20 minutes at first, longer as they become more comfortable with both the observation and the feedback).
- The two people meet afterwards — undisturbed — for 10 minutes (it needs to be short at first).

During this meeting:

- The observed and observer(s) should sit with the data between them.
- The observed should refocus on the questions s/he asked. That is, reflect on the questions in light of the data being brought back by the observer.
- The observer(s) should share the things they saw, heard, and tracked rather than what they thought about them. Allowing the observer(s) to evaluate or judge the observed will poison the process quickly.
- There should be some talk of what did and didn't happen and how the observed could make it happen next time.
- The observed should encourage the observer to reflect on the relevance of the data to the questions.
- Both the observer(s) and observed should watch for defensive behavior.
- All should work to make sure the observed doesn't get into a defend/attack dialogue (if the observed feels a need to defend him or herself, s/he should stop the conversation and talk about why s/he feels that way and what it would take to reduce that behavior).
- The observer(s) should check for signals to see when the observed has had enough.